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AUTHOR Boyer, Ernest L.
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ABSTRACT

Student apathy, alcohol abuse, racial and ethnic divisions, and acts of incivility are weakening the integrity of many higher education institutions and limiting their ability to function as vital communities of learning. A set of agreed-upon standards of campus governance is needed to guide the conduct of all members of the community and give direction to the institution. Five principles provide a framework within which a vital community of learning can be built: (1) a purposeful community, where the intellectual life is central and where faculty and students work together to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus; (2) a just community, where the dignity of all individuals is affirmed and where equality of opportunity is vigorously pursued; (3) an open community, where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed; (4) a disciplined community, where individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good; and (5) a caring community, where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported and where service to others is encouraged. (JDD)

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IN SEARCH OF COMMUNITY

by Ernest L. Boyer
President

The Carnegie Foundation for
the Advancement of Teaching

American Council on Education
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INTRODUCTION

During the last forty years American higher education has become, by almost every measure, a remarkable success. New campuses have been built, enrollments have exploded, and our great research universities have become world class. Women, minorities, and older students have enrolled in ever larger numbers, making the nation's campuses intellectually richer, and culturally more diverse. Simply stated, we have built, in the United States, a truly remarkable network of higher learning institutions, the envy of the world.

Still, the nation's colleges and universities confront tensions, and nowhere are the strains of change more apparent than in campus life. Recently a group of college presidents, in discussing their concerns, zeroed in on what one president described as "the declining quality of life on campus." He explained his frustration this way: "We have growing racial tensions on the campus, and more crime. The spirit of community seems diminished and I'm frustrated about how the university should respond."

Another president noted that white, black, Hispanic, and Asian students at his university have organized themselves into what he called "separate worlds."

And the president of a large public university then made this confession: "I've been around a long time and frankly I'm more concerned today than in the sixties. Back then, you could meet with critics and confront problems head on. Today, there seems to be a lot of tension just below the surface that could explode anytime."

Later, when we surveyed 500 college and university presidents, over half of them said "campus life problems" are of greater concern today than they were several years ago.

It was in this climate that The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, in cooperation with the American Council on Education, launched a study of campus life. Throughout our year-long investigation--one that included a literature review, campus visits, and a presidential survey--we were impressed that most colleges and universities in the nation are essentially in good health, and well managed.

But we also found that student apathy, alcohol abuse, and even racial and ethnic divisions and acts of incivility weaken the integrity of many institutions and limit

their ability to function as vital communities of learning. Administrators are understandably concerned about these problems. But they also are, we found, ambivalent about how they should respond.

There was a time when college leaders felt responsible, not only for the nurturing of the students' intellectual life, but for the guardianship of their morality as well. This was done with rules, regulations, and restrictions. The problem today is that while rigid rule-making--*in loco parentis*--has been abolished, no theory of campus governance has been discovered to replace it. No one argues for a return to those days when colleges arbitrarily imposed a list of "dos" and "don'ts" on students. But many are now asking:

- Where does the responsibility of the college begin and end?
- Where is the balance to be struck between students' rights and institutional concerns?
- And how can the spirit of community in higher education be strengthened?

Clearly, more rules are not the answer. What we do need is a new, *post in loco parentis,* theory of campus governance--a set of agreed-upon standards to guide the conduct of all members of the community and give direction to the institution overall. In response to this challenge, we organized our report around five familiar, yet essential principles that capture the essence of both the social *and* academic dimensions of campus life--at *all* institutions. And we believe these principles also may provide a framework within which a vital community of learning can be built.

I. A PURPOSEFUL COMMUNITY

Our first principle relates to goals. A college or university is, above all, a ***purposeful*** *community, a place where the intellectual life is central and where faculty and students work together to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus.*

At the outset, we decided to limit our investigation to what one president called "the social pathologies of the campus." But it soon became clear that the "academic" and "non-academic" could not be divided. When we asked students what engaged them after class, most spoke about their jobs. The common ground many seemed to share was not education, but getting a credential, and we were forced to conclude that the vitality of American higher education is being threatened, not just by careless conduct, but most especially, by the students' lack of serious commitment to the academic life.

Our 1989 faculty survey revealed that two-thirds of today's professors believe their students are not academically well-prepared; over 60 percent said they are teaching undergraduates what they should have learned in high school; 55 percent said undergraduates are "doing just enough to get by," and three-fourths believed that students, today, are "less willing" to work hard on their studies.

Further, according to Alexander Astin's most recent data, 77 percent of the students surveyed spent less than 16 hours every week in out-of-class study. This is hardly surprising since, according to the latest ACE data, three-fourths of today's students have a job and work, on average, 37 hours every week.

No one expects undergraduates to be academic "grinds." There must be relief, relaxation, and even work. But a college is, above all, a place of learning and improving campus life means having students who are "active learners." It means having classes that are small enough for undergraduates to collaborate on common projects and it means having dedicated teachers who advise students, serve as mentors, and extend the intellectual life beyond the classroom.

General education also has a vital role to play. After all, a core curriculum can give focus and direction to learning. Several colleges in our study have expanded core requirements. And yet we found that all too many students, while completing the required courses, fail to see connections that would give them a more coherent view of knowledge and a more authentic, more integrated view of life.

Barbara McClintock, the Nobel winning geneticist, said on one occasion that "Everything is one." "There is," she said, "no way to draw a line between things!" I wonder if Professor McClintock has looked at a college catalogue in recent days.

Frank Press, President of the National Academy of Sciences, captured this same spirit when he suggested that the scientist is, in some respects, an artist, too. Dr. Press went on to observe that the magnificent double helix, which broke the genetic code, was not only rational, it was beautiful as well.

And when the physicist Victor Weiskopf was asked, "What gives you hope in troubled times?" he replied, "Mozart and Quantum Mechanics." But where in the college experience do students discover connections such as these?

Fifty years ago, Mark Van Doren wrote that the "connectedness of things" is what the educator contemplates to the limits of his capacity. Van Doren went on to observe that "the student who can begin, early in life, to see things as connected has begun the life of learning."

I'm suggesting that a college is, above all, a purposeful community, a place where teaching and learning matter most. And if academic concerns are not vitally sustained, if faculty and students do not come together around a common intellectual quest, then all the talk about strengthening community in higher education is simply a diversion.

II. A JUST COMMUNITY

This brings me to principle number two. A college or university also is a just community, a place where the dignity of all individuals is affirmed and where equality of opportunity is vigorously pursued.

Affirming justice is one of the most urgent obligations higher education--and the nation--now confront. Many of us recall the 1950s when Rosa Parks got on a bus, and decided to sit up front. We also recall the sixties when black students sat at a lunch counter and simply asked for service. It was the decade when U.S. Marshals escorted James Meredith onto the campus of "Old Miss." And this was the decade when Martin Luther King, whose birthday we celebrate this week, led a great crusade.

We recall these historic times, but many of our students don't. And there is disturbing evidence that the urgent push for greater justice in this country has dramatically diminished and that higher education's great potential as a force for equality remains sadly unfulfilled.

Especially disturbing is the fact that minority students, when they come to campus, often feel a sense of isolation, and racial tensions seem to be increasing, especially at large research and doctoral institutions where 68 percent of the presidents we surveyed said race relations is a problem, the second most serious problem they mentioned.

I recognize that inequality is rooted in society at large. But still it falls on higher education to have an unequivocal commitment to social justice, and in this crusade, the college president must lead the way.

Several years ago, Nannerl Keohane, president of Wellesley College, named a task force on racism. The group looked hard at attitudes on campus and prepared a report that gave the college important information about the racial climate and proposed strategies for renewal.

President Keohane, upon receiving the report, made the following declaration: "It is important," she said, "that we confront racism, recognizing its complexities and its deep-rootedness in our culture. We must face up to its particular manifestations . . . not treat it gingerly and pretend it's irrelevant to us."

It is my conviction that the 1990s is the decade in which equality of opportunity, for all Americans, once again, must become a national crusade. Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans and all others must be socially and economically empowered and the nation's colleges and universities should take the lead.

Injustice, of course, takes many forms, and our study revealed that, even though progress has been made, women still encounter prejudice on campus--ranging from tenure problems to harassment. At colleges, both large and small, we heard about demeaning attitudes toward women. The editor of the student newspaper at one university described T-shirts that read, "Ten reasons why beer is better than women." We also found that 62 percent of presidents at research and doctoral institutions consider sexual harassment a campus problem. At the other four-year institutions, about 30 percent of the presidents said it's a problem.

We will become a nation worthy of our heritage only when full dignity is extended to women. Academic departments should provide equitable access to them. Teaching and research, by and about women, is important. Professors should be sensitive to the treatment of female students in the classroom. And it is also essential that everyone on campus have an understanding of the subtle, and not so subtle, discrimination women experience on campus, and in society at large.

Here then is our conclusion. If the nation's colleges and universities are to be *just* communities, prejudice in all its forms must be challenged and every college should develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen pluralism, within a community of learning.

Eleanor Holmes Norton put the issue squarely when she said that an institution of higher education should be characterized "by its commitment to ideals and standards that transcend the realities of daily life. It should not be an ivory tower, detached and unrealistic . . . but it must always respond to the pull of basic values," which she describes as, "decency, fair play, and justice."

The goal must be equality for all.

III. AN OPEN COMMUNITY

*Third, a college or university, at its best, is an **open, honest** community, a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed.*

Colleges and universities confront two sometimes competing issues that are at the very center of collegiate life. On the one hand, they must maintain an absolute commitment to the free expression of ideas while also assuring that the use of language is neither deceptive or abusive; maintaining the balance is not easy.

One of our most troublesome findings was the growing inclination among some students to use words, not as the key to understanding, but as weapons of assault. And this breakdown of civility is revealing itself most frequently in racial, ethnic, and sexual slurs.

Once again, the problem appears to be most difficult for larger institutions where more than 60 percent of the presidents say "sexual harassment" is a problem, and about half listed "racial harassment" as a problem. Further, when we asked presidents what would improve campus life, 86 percent of those at large universities said "new and revised statements on civility and respect for others."

Especially troublesome is the controversy over outside speakers. At a large state university the Black Student Union invited Louis Farrakahn to speak. Some students and state legislators opposed the use of student fees to pay a speaker they considered "black racist." They also objected to using state money to provide security to protect this speaker against disruption. The university defended the rights of students to invite any speaker of their choice, regardless of his views, and declared that the threat of disruption should not be allowed to abridge free speech. The event occurred without serious incident.

At another institution the drama department invited a black actress to perform a one-woman show called "Nigger Cafe." The administrator, who approved the act, felt the drama would help students gain new insights regarding race relations. The invitation was opposed, however, by a senior black faculty member and the Black Student Union who found the title offensive. Pressure against the performance became so great that the dean, in consultation with department chairs, withdrew the invitation.

It's understandable that presidents are looking for ways to encourage civility and define the boundaries of speech. Rational discourse is, after all, at the heart of academic life and civility is essential if a community of learning is to flourish.

But there is another side to the equation. A college or university is, by definition, a place for the free expression of ideas, even when the opinions seem to be outrageous. We conclude, therefore, that any effort to restrict speech by *regulation*, regardless of intent, is unacceptable in a community of learning.

Derek Bok, president of Harvard University, in responding to a grossly demeaning letter about women circulated on campus, put the issue this way:

> "Although such statements are deplorable," Bok said, "they are presumed to be protected under the Constitution and should be equally so on the campus as well. Why? The critical question is: Whom will we trust to censor communications and decide which ones are 'too offensive' or 'too inflammatory' or 'too devoid of intellectual content?' . . . As a former president of the University of California once said: 'The University is not engaged in making ideas safe for students. It is engaged in making students safe for ideas.'"

But protecting speech in all its forms does not mean remaining passive--especially when the boundaries of honesty and decency have been crossed. What the university *should* do, we believe, is define high standards for itself and denounce the violation of those standards in clear, unequivocal terms. Again Bok states the case with precision. In response to the offensive letter, he insisted that the university had an obligation to condemn it in the strongest possible terms:

> "The wording of the letter was so extreme and derogatory to women," said Bok, "that I wanted to communicate my disapproval publicly, if only to make sure that no one could gain the false impression that the Harvard administration harbored any sympathy or complacency toward the tone and substance of the letter. Such action does not infringe on free speech. Indeed, statements of disagreement are part and parcel of the open debate that freedom of speech is meant to encourage; the right to condemn a point of view is as protected as the right to express it."

But in matters of communication there is a still higher standard. Students should be reminded that civility means, not just *speaking* carefully, but *listening* carefully as well.

One day, when I was Chancellor of the State University of New York, I was about to speak to faculty from across the state when several hundred students moved in with placards, chanting slogans, demanding that I help free a group of students who had been arrested on another campus the night before.

The microphone was grabbed and, for almost an hour, we went back and forth. Finally, in desperation, I concluded the meeting was in shambles and that we weren't listening to each other. Even worse, it was apparent that I was talking not to *students,* but to a faceless crowd.

More out of desperation than inspiration, I left the platform and began talking to a single student. I asked her name, I asked about her family. Soon others joined us. For the first time, we began to listen to each other. And to make the story short, the session ended, a compromise was reached, and, in the process, I had learned to know some most attractive students.

Wayne Booth of the University of Chicago captured the essence of civility when he wrote that all too often our efforts to speak and listen seem to be a vicious spiral moving downward. "But we have all experienced," Booth went on to say, "moments when the spiral moved upward, when one party's efforts to listen and speak just a little bit better, produced a similar response," making it possible to move on up the spiral to "moments of genuine understanding."

In an open community, freedom of expression must be uncompromisingly defended. At the same time, offensive language must be vigorously denounced. But above all, an open, honest community means viewing language as a sacred trust and affirming that truth is the obligation we assume when we are empowered with the use of words.

IV. A DISCIPLINED COMMUNITY

I have a fourth principle, one that follows from the last. A college or university is, necessarily, a ***disciplined*** *community, a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good.*

Almost all of us remember the days when women's dorms were locked up tighter than a drum, when there were rigid study hours and when lights were out at eleven o'clock sharp, except on weekends. We also can remember the sea of change that occurred in the 1960s when *in loco parentis* was abolished, almost overnight.

It might be a bit confessional, but this was the period when my hair turned from black to white. I was at the State University of New York. We had in the entire SUNY system 93,000 dormitory beds and I recall the heated debates over whether freshmen should be allowed to live off-campus, whether visiting hours should be abolished, and whether residence halls should be "coed." In the end, the answer to all was affirmative.

Looking back, I'm convinced that creating a more open, less restrictive campus was essential, long overdue. Students are adults, not children. Most of them know how to balance freedom and responsibility in their daily lives and no one imagines returning to the days when young women were locked in, when there was lights out at eleven and when rulebreaking often meant suspension or expulsion.

Administrators are no longer "parents," but many are now asking: What are the standards by which student conduct should be judged, especially if that behavior is personally and socially destructive? We found, for example, that two-thirds of all college presidents rate alcohol abuse a serious problem and at research and doctoral institutions it's 82 percent. And, when we asked *all* presidents to name their greatest concern, substance abuse, especially alcohol, was listed number one.

All human communities have their dark side, and colleges are no exception. Alcohol especially has been a part of campus life from the very first. Still, a disciplined community means caring for one's health and if state laws say alcohol use is illegal for those under twenty-one, colleges should support the law rather than ignore it. Students need models of courage, not equivocation.

We also found presidents concerned about increased crime. Almost one-third of those at liberal arts colleges report "theft" a problem, and at the larger institutions, two-thirds of the presidents consider it a problem. It's only an anecdote, but one liberal arts college in our study reported a 27 percent increase in vandalism in just one year.

On quite another front we found lack of discipline reflected in "excessive noise and disruptiveness in campus residences," which 65 percent of the liberal arts college presidents reported as a problem. And concerns about the standards of fraternity life were especially acute. A student affairs administrator at a private university told us that fraternities on his campus often "rate" female party guests at the door, by writing numbers on their hands. He also said that fraternity leaders have confessed to him that lots of alcohol is served "so we can get the women drunk enough to have sex."

We conclude that fraternities can be a constructive force. But we also say in our report that an institution of higher learning simply cannot tolerate prejudicial conduct. And unless fraternities commit themselves to decency and civility, they have no place in campus life.

Problems notwithstanding, we were impressed that almost all colleges and universities we visited are confronting these issues and deserve more credit than the headlines would suggest. Consider, for example, that ninety percent of the nation's colleges and universities have alcohol education and prevention programs; more than 70 percent have special task forces on substance abuse, and almost everywhere we found seminars on crime prevention. Chaplains and campus religious centers provide support, are active, and students are helping to shape new codes of conduct.

Again, no one wants to return to the days of rigid regulations. But it is our position that institutions of higher learning need standards, not just in academic matters but in non-academic matters, too.

V. A CARING COMMUNITY

*Finally, a college or university is a **caring** community, a place where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported and where service to others is encouraged.*

At first blush, the term "caring" seems soft, almost sentimental. And yet, caring is the key.

As human beings we have an absolute need for social bonding, from the first to the last moments of our lives. Professor Mary Clark at San Diego State University puts the matter this way: "Social bonds," she writes, "are not temporary contracts entered into simply for the convenience of an individual, but are absolute requirements for human existence. Social embeddedness," Clark concludes, "is the essence of our nature." And I'm convinced that--as impossible as the goal may seem to be--a modern college or university, at its best, is a place where every individual feels affirmed.

Caring is, in fact, the key to everything I've said because while colleges should be *purposeful,* and *just,* and *disciplined*--as well as free and open--the unique characteristics that will make these objectives work, the glue that holds it all together, is the way people relate to one another.

Today's students cherish their independence. They're pleased that *in loco parentis* has finally been abolished. But undergraduates, like the rest of us, still need to feel that they belong. One student captured this ambivalence when she said, "We don't want the university to be involved *in* our lives, but we would like someone to be concerned occasionally *about* our lives."

Frankly, I was troubled when our last survey of undergraduates revealed that about 50 percent of today's students said they "feel like a number in a book," about 40 percent did not feel a sense of community on campus, and about two-thirds said they have no professor interested in their personal lives. And when just recently we asked 500 presidents to rank problems, "lack of student participation in activities on campus" topped the list; 76 percent cited it as a problem.

Today's students are, in fact, forming their own groups to overcome the anonymity of the campus, just as they have always done. A professor at a large Western university told us that, "Loyalty to the big institution develops only after

the 'little loyalties' have been established." And a student at a liberal arts college made a similar observation: "You can't have a community of the whole without the smaller groups."

Communities-within-community surely are essential, but not sufficient. Now, more than ever, students--and all others on the campus--must connect with the institution as a whole, and the university should take the initiative for community building, without a return to the rigidities of regulation. Indeed, when we asked presidents what should be done to improve campus life, two-thirds said "more interaction between faculty and students." Still more significant, well over 90 percent said that strengthening community was important at their institution. How is this to be accomplished?

The good news is that creative steps already are being taken. We found:

- New orientation programs that introduce undergraduates to the goals of liberal education and to the academic traditions of college

- All-campus seminars and discussions and debates in the student union

- Advisory arrangements that keep students and faculty together for several years

- Community service programs for all students to encourage them to relate their learning to the realities of life

These programs are appropriate for *all* higher learning institutions in the nation. Martin Luther King declared that, "Everyone can be great because everyone can serve." And, I'm convinced that the young people of this nation are ready to be inspired by a larger vision.

CONCLUSION

I recognize that the five principles I've discussed are all familiar. They can be found, to one degree or another, on almost every campus in the country. But it seems to me that, taken together and continuously affirmed, they can provide a useful framework for the building of community in higher education.

For example, the principles might be adopted by trustees, or discussed with students during orientation, or with new faculty, or used by presidents in deciding which student groups should be approved. Some colleges may wish to adopt formally the principles as a "Campus Compact." And it occurred to me that one or more of these principles, justice, for example, might become the topic of a year-long, campus-wide discussion, and provide, perhaps, the foundation for a new philosophy of campus life.

Regardless of how the principles are used, I'm convinced that if colleges and universities are to reach their full potential, if they are to be something more than a service center for credentials, larger loyalties are required.

And finally, before leaving, I'd like to make a few, quite personal, observations. I believe that the issues I've been discussing reach far beyond the campus. I'm troubled that America seems to be increasingly divisive, that racial tensions seem to be increasing, that our cities are divided so tragically between the affluent and the poor. And I'm especially troubled that, in recent years, we seem to celebrate self-indulgence, while service is often undervalued.

When all is said and done we really *do* need each other. No one can make it all alone, and I'm continuously haunted by the question: "If colleges and universities cannot find common goals, if higher education cannot overcome the intellectual and social separations that so diminish our quality of life, what then can we expect from society at large?"

On the other hand, it is my deep conviction that as we bring purposefulness, justice, discipline, honesty, and caring to the campus not only will the integrity of higher education be affirmed, but we also can bring renewal to the nation.